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ABSTRACT

The Annotation Exchange System (developed by A. V. Manzo) is an organized collection of students' brief written critiques of various books and shorter selections, which might be initiated in a study skills class. In the classroom setting, students can be given direct instruction and practice in summary writing, a building block of effective reading comprehension. The Annotation Exchange System can be extended to include sharing the system with other instructors when they require annotations on topics related to their disciplines. It can also be extended to other entities such as libraries, public schools, other campuses, and even other regions and countries. In this way, the university can act as both agent and catalyst for the clarification and distribution of fresh ideas and perspectives among participating entities. (One figure is included and 19 references are attached.) (Author/RS)

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# Report of Manzo's Annotation Exchange System at Work in a University (with suggestions for its use elsewhere)

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Paper presented at

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Running Head: ANNOTATION EXCHANGE

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Abstract

The Annotation Exchange System is an organized collection of students' brief written critiques of various books and shorter selections. This paper reports how this collection might be initiated in a Study Skills class. In this setting students can be given direct instruction and practice in summary writing, a building block of effective reading comprehension. A classroom setting, in any case, also provides a solid opportunity for students to sharpen and share their annotations, and therefore perspectives on various textual pieces. The Annotation Exchange System can be extended to include sharing with other instructors, as they require annotations on topics related to their disciplines. It also can be extended to other entities such as libraries, public schools, other campuses, and even other regions and countries. In this way, the university can act as both agent and catalyst for the clarification and distribution of fresh ideas and perspectives among participating entities.

# Report of Manzo's Annotation Exchange System at Work in a University, (with suggestions for its use elsewhere)

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The Annotation Exchange is an exciting and innovative way of promoting enjoyment of, and interest in, reading from elementary to graduate school. Manzo has been advocating the adoption of this systematic collection and sharing of annotations since the early 70's (1971, 1972, 1986). Although the idea is widely known and recognized in the form of a study skill strategy called REAP (Eanet and Manzo, 1976), it generally is not at work as an annotation excahnge system. This may be due to the fact that earlier descriptions of this system were too brief and/or vague. In an effort to make the Annotation Exchange System a firmer reality, I have worked out several detailed instructions for the successful operation of this multifaceted system.

First, I shall describe how Manzo (1972, 1986) envisions the Annotation Exchange System, including some of the resulting benefits he suggests might occur. Next, I will discuss and give explicit instructions for how I have set up such a system in a College Reading and Study Skills program. I shall include step-by-step procedures for teaching college students how to write annotations. Finally, I shall conclude with suggestions for how various disciplines and institutions might participate in the Annotation Exchange.

Description and Benefits

Manzo's Annotation Exchange is an organized and systematic collection of readers' response to materials, primarily books, which have been read and recorded in the form of written annotations. Manzo (1986) looks into the future, seeing a highly technological world and envisions annotations being stored in computers and available to readers of all nations. This way, unique ideas may be shared with the world and people will have an opportunity to react to each others annotations. Manzo sees this as a particular asset to students in Third World Nations.

According to Manzo (1972, 1986), the benefits of Annotation Exchange Systems are numerous and far reaching. First, this system allows great minds to communicate with other great minds. As such, they may inspire or provoke an even more valuable idea than either started with. These readers need never have met, and quite possibly, could be from different parts of the country or world. Their only bond would be an idea or ideas that were based on or inspired from a piece of writing.

The other benefits Manzo (1972) suggests are related to comprehension. It has been found that summary and annotation writing have positive effects on student's reading comprehension as this type of writing requires heightened attention (Craik & Lockhart, 1972, Doctorow, Wittrock, & Marks, 1978) and organization (Eanet & Manzo, 1976, Odell, 1980, Hayes, 1987). Further, students not only are provided with an opportunity to "crystallize" their ideas, but these ideas can be shared with others.

Other benefits of the Annotation Exchange can be seen when the literature is reviewed regarding summary or precis writing. It has been shown that this type of activity enhances retention, as well as comprehension (Sachs, 1967, Doctorow, Wittrock, & Marks, 1979; Taylor & Berkowitz, 1980, Bromely, 1985, D'Angelo, 1983; Anderson, 1972, Stosky, 1982). Since an annotation is very similar to a summary or a precis, in that they are both a synopsis derived from a piece of writing, the resulting benefits should be similar. The above mentioned research, therefore, serves as both a benefit of, and a rationale for, the Annotation Exchange.

These benefits were further clarified when a questionnaire was given to 37 college freshmen after learning how to write annotations. The questionnaire asked: "Is it helpful to read an annotation prior to reading assigned material? Is it helpful to write an annotation after reading assigned material? Both? Neither?"

Of the students surveyed, 30% felt it was helpful to read an annotation prior to reading assigned material, 22% felt it was helpful to write an annotation after reading assigned material, 43% selected both; and less than 6% selected neither.

The questionnaire also asked why they chose the responses they did and their reasons were exciting. The students brought up issues they had discussed throughout the semester and used them as reasons in the context of annotations. Their reasons included statements such as:

> Because it makes you think about what you read and when you write the gist of the article, you remember it better.

> It gives me the chance to really consider what I have read and to think things through related to the material.
>
> They serve two different functions. Reading an annotation prior to reading material allows the reader to have a little bit of background knowledge of the subject. Writing an annotation after reading the material allows the reader to review and better understand what he has read.
>
> Reading an annotation beforehand gives me some background knowledge, and writing an annotation afterwards shows me that I understand what I have read and could add something that the annotation misses.
>
> This is helpful for me because it will give me an idea of what the article will be about. Reading the annotation will get my schema going before I read the article.
>
> This gives me a better understanding of what I am about to read and I can read it faster. It's kind of like surveying.

After the questionnaire was completed, I passed out an article and said, "Read the article." One student asked, "And then write an annotation? What's our purpose?" As I looked around the class, I noticed many students surveying before they read. These responses further substantiate the benefits of annotation writing, as it provides students an opportunity to see that the concepts and techniques taught in Study Skills courses are indeed valuable. It also provides the instructor with an opportunity to see whether students are truly understanding what they are reading and what they have been taught about strategic reading and study.

The academic benefits of annotation writing involve more than comprehension and retention. Hynd, Simpson, and Chase (1988) suggest that when students annotate portions of a novel these annotations could be used

to improve discussion and test taking behaviors. In a study conducted by these researchers, support was found regarding improvements on objective tests for students who annotated novels.

Some additional benefits of the Annotation Exchange System include the opportunity it provides for different disciplines and different institutions to interact while sharing literature and thought. The content disciplines can become quite isolated from one another, and even more so among elementary, secondary and other post-secondary institutions. The Annotation Exchange System provides a viable vehicle, that when working, can help alleviate this unfortunate situation by building bridges among these entities. The common bond which emerges duplicates the basic principals by which progress always has occured: one person learns something, then elaborates and modifies it, and finally, shares it with others. This is the essence of the Annotation Exchange System. It further returns communication to its' proper role as social mediation.

To institute a nationwide Annotation Exchange System there would need to be a joint effort on the part of college reading and study skills specialists in the nations universities. The reasons being that the college reading specialist is the perfect one to teach annotations, and the study skills classroom is the ideal setting.

Experiences at the University of Missouri-Kansas City have shown me that annotations are best recorded and stored in a computer in order to simplify the process of adding annotations. They also should be printed and kept in a notebook where they can be available to student users.

There are special benefits to developing an Annotation Exchange System at a university. Although it can be added to any course, it also contains a universal component that encourages the participation of all students. The ideal place in which to begin making the Annotation Exchange a universal system is in the universities, since they have students from all over the world. Instructors should, therefore, encourage students for whom English is not their primary language (ESL) to read and annotate books in their native language. This aspect of the Annotation Exchange could help to solve another problem: professors tend to find the writing of ESL students academically unacceptable (Santos, 1988), lacking depth, and lacking logical argument (Lebauer, 1985). Encouraging ESL students to read books in their native language alleviates a lot of frustration both on the part of the reader and the writer. In addition, this should encourage the expansion of collections of foreign literature at academic libraries, which according to Schreiver-Robles (1988), is very much needed.

If, on the other hand, an ESL student would choose to read an English book, the annotations previously written could provide a much needed aid in comprehension, and a point of departure for further reactions and writing. At any rate, the decision for what book to read should be left to the students, as this system attempts to, as Parrott (1987) advocates, allow ESL students to read for pleasure.

## Teaching Annotation Writing to College Students

The following paragraphs provide step-by-step instructions on how to teach annotation writing to college students in study skills classes.

Here, the instructions consist of six sessions, however,when using this procedure, the sessions do not need to be presented as separate units on six consecutive days. The exercises on annotation writing should be inter-mixed with discussions of the reading process, but are presented here separately, merely for the sake of clarity.

Session 1

An explanation of REAP (Eanet & Manzo, 1976).
An explanation of annotations.
Ask for questions.
Pass out a 1 page article.
Students read article and then write an annotation on the back (don't worry, everyone feels awkward the first time; they write about what they have read).
Ask for volunteers to read their annotation.
The teacher tells the class 1) what is good about the annotation, 2) what is not necessary, and 3) what needs to be added.

Session 2

Review annotations.
Ask for questions.
Do you want to revise annotations? (most do).
Give to teacher. Teacher reads annotations aloud and comments on each. After awhile students also are able to comment.

Session 3

Review annotations.
Ask for questions.
Pass out one page article.
Students read the article then write an annotation on the back.
Give to teacher. Teacher reads annotations aloud and comments on each.

Note: The teacher points out that even though all the annotations are based on the same one page article (not a lot of information), they are all different. The aspects of the article students consider important will depend on their previous experience with the subject. The teacher discusses how person A may feel one way and person B may feel another, and person C still another. Thus, demonstrating to the students that --- yes, we do take our prior knowledge with us to the printed page and that it is very important as we attempt to interpret prose.

Session 4 — Pass out one article to half the class and a different article to the other half.
Read article, write annotation on the back, give to teacher. Teacher reads several annotations of article A, and then asks, "Do the people who did not read article A get a feel for what the article was about?" The teacher does the same for article B.

Session 5 — Pass out article/several pages long.
Read article.
Write annotation on back.
Write name and class.

Session 6 — Pass out an article for which another class wrote an annotation on the back.
Read the annotation.
Read the article.
Write an annotation.
Return the article from session five which they had annotated and was followed by an annotation from a student in another class.

## Expanding the Exchange

Once college reading instructors and students have a firm grasp of this system, and at least 50 annotations have been collected, it is time to invite other disciplines to join the Exchange. This is a justified and potentially beneficial aspect of the Exchange, since, according to Hynd, Simpson, and Chase (1988), novels are required reading in courses in literature, history, sociology, philosophy, political science and even geography. Invitations, therefore, should be provided to individual instructors of content courses and should include descriptions, goals and rational for the Annotation Exchange. In addition, each instructor should be given an opportunity to create their own recommended book list related to their individual contents. The book lists can be specific with one category,

or broad with several subcategories. An example for a sociology class might be a list of books about wars and a corresponding notebook containing subsequent annotations.

When instructors of different disciplins join the Annotation Exchange they often ask for examples of annotations to share with their students. This is especially helpful since the syllabus for specific content courses seldom have time for the teaching of annotation writing.

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Insert Figure 1 here

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As more and more instructors join the Annotation Exchange the larger it will become, perhaps moving beyond the walls of the university. Children's Literature classes, for example, provide an appropriate avenue for doing just that. I would suggest however, that college students and teachers be invited to combine their annotations with those of children's. Here, the Annotation Exchange presents a unique opportunity to view books from a child's eye and from the perspective of teachers and future teachers. In this way, the system can establish a dialogue amoung readers from elementary to graduate school.

## Teaching Annotation Writing to Elementary Students

When classroom teachers are invited to join the Annotation Exchange, they too usually ask for direction on how to teach annotation writing to elementary students. The following sections, therefore, provide specific

suggestions that can be used by the classroom teacher. When teaching annotation writing to older elementary children the following should be considered:

Teacher Preparation

You need several short stories that can be written on one or two sheets of paper. These stories should be easy reading for most of your students and you need enough copies so each student has his own story. Also, you need to write a good summary and be aware of key ideas that should be mentioned in a good summary.

Teacher Knowledge

An annotation is brief - leave out "this story was about"... - instead begin with "A little girl and her dog..." An annotation includes the key ideas - the gist - what the reader thinks is important (when dealing with children concentrate on what the teacher thinks is important). An annotation does not include trivia, redundancies, descriptions or conversations. An annotation is written from the annotator's point of view - his reaction to the story/characters and his adjectives to describe the story.

Practice Summarizing

Teacher should model the following procedure. After modeling, students should practice deletions with teacher on overhead.

1) Pass out story
2) Read story
3) Discuss how to write annotations
4) Use different colors of crayons to practice deletions, for example:
   green - trivia
   blue - redundancy
   yellow - conversation
   purple - descriptions
5) Use red crayon to underline key-idea words/phrases/sentences

Practice Annotating

Using these colored markings and earlier discussions students should write their own annotations. Tell them everyone feels funny the first time. You may want to read your own for an example.

Sharing and Editing

Always read students annotations aloud and comment on each, (1) what is good about it, (2) what is not necessary, and (3) what needs to be added. Finally, provide time for revision.

Next, are suggestions on how to teach annotation writing to younger elementary children:

When working with young children who cannot spell, or cannot spell many words, the teacher should begin by talking about how different stories can make you feel. Children should then be asked to tell how stories have made them feel, for example, happy, sad, angry, excited, scared. Also should talk about the kinds of stories students would like to read.

Next, take a trip to the library and let the children pick out a book to read. Set aside time to read books in class or take books home to read, or you can read a book aloud.

After children have read or heard their stories, ask the children how the stories made them feel and write the words on the board (i.e., bored, happy, sad, scared). Next, talk about words you can use to describe books (i.e., funny, nice, scary, awful) and write them in a second column on the board. Finally, talk about words that can be used to describe characters in a story (i.e., fat, tall, nice, old, sweet) and write them in a third column on the board.

Using the annotation form children can write an annotation. Children can begin the annotation with: This story made me feel because_____

_____

The above phrase should be printed where it can be seen by all the children, perhaps on a sentence strip.
Additional suggestions are as follows:
1) With a small group of children you can use a language experience format, and 2) If you read a book aloud, all the children should write separate annotations.

To introduce a closing point, the Annotation Exchange System seems a very useful way to generate the thing that makes writing most worthwhile, an audience interested and willing to read what one has written. While this alone would justify the effort, there is also Manzo's visions that as we get to talking to one another across ages, cultures and other barriers, greater understanding and empathy will follow.

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Figure 1
Examples of Annotations

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1. Book: Windmill of the Gods, by Sidney Sheldon
   Annotation A: "I could identify with the main character, who was a female instructor in a Midwestern University, and I was so surprised to discover that the Doctor was the bad guy."

   Annotation B: " I too, could identify with the main character, and also some of the story took place in Washington D.C. (where I grew up). I wasn't surprised the Doctor was the bad guy, but it never crossed my mind that the assassin was a woman."

2. Plato's Works
   "This sounds like 'Schema Theory'"

3. Book: Love Songs, by Lawrence Sanders
   The author's writing is very abstract; so was my LD student's. I wonder if there's a connection."

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